

Screen: British Espionage Triumphs

'Operation Crossbow' Bows at Music Hall

By BOSLEY CROWTHER

OUTSIDE of the fact that it is an odd one to turn up as the "Easter film" at the Music Hall, "Operation Crossbow" is a beauty that no action-mystery-spy movie fan should miss. It is a grandly engrossing and exciting melodrama of wartime espionage, done with stunning documentary touches in a tight, tense, heroic story line. And even though its terminal pyrotechnics may seem a bit far from the mood of the "Glory of Easter" pageant and the vernal stage show that opened at the hall yesterday, it does end piously and quietly on a note of hope for the peaceful future of mankind.

It is, to put it quite simply—much more simply than the film itself is put—a story, part fact and part fiction, of how a complex British espionage team (which includes an inevitable American), acting under the secret direction of Duncan Sandys, discovers and scouts and finally blows up the deadly rocket bases in Nazi Germany and finally knocks out an underground factory from which a rocket to hit New York is about to be launched.

That is the substance of it, but that does not begin to tell the staggering complexity of its details and the swift precision with which they are interlocked. Richard Imrie, Derry Quinn and Ray Rigby have put together a script that fairly bristles with assorted activities.

From the mellow cabinet room of the Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street, whence a grim, brooding Winston Churchill (Patrick Wymark) dispatches Duncan Sandys (Richard Johnson) to look into this business of secret weapons being constructed in Nazi Germany, "Operation Crossbow" skyrockets directly to the technical planning stage, to the business of preparation and training and then, spang, into Germany!

It deftly counterpoints the tough recruitment of a team of Allied experts who will do the crucial spying and sabotaging behind the enemy lines against some brilliantly re-enacted drama of the Nazi efforts to launch their V-1 rockets, then their V-2's. It briskly builds up a realization of the urgency of the enterprise by pounding the eyes and ears of the audience with inter-cuts of the damage these missiles do. And then it



Sophia Loren and George Peppard in scene from the film

completes the excitement with the tracing and the tying of the many strands of adventures and calamities of the fellows who drop into Germany.

There's the American, played by George Peppard, who has the most activity and suspense, including a touch-and-go brush with the widow of the German scientist whose identity he has assumed. The widow is played intensely by a black-wigged Sophia Loren. There's a Netherlander, played by Tom Courtenay, who is caught rather early along, and there's a wonderfully dry British agent who comes along later. He is played deliciously by Jeremy Kemp.

Behind these, there's a slew of apt supporters—Lilli Palmer as a German innkeeper, John Mills as the chief of M. I. 6, Sylvia Syms as a photo interpreter, Maurice Denham as a Royal Air Force general, Richard Todd as a shrewd intelligence officer, Trevor Howard as an unregenerate skeptic and many more.

The Nazis are played expertly by such old hands at this always juicy task as Paul Henreid, Helmut Dantine, Karl Stepanek and Barbara Ruetting, who is impressive as the test pilot of the V-1 flying bomb.

The whole thing is shot in excellent color, under the fine direction of Michael An-

derson, who is best remembered for his direction of "Around the World in 80 Days." And a strong illusion of actuality is got by having the Nazi characters speak German and using English subtitles to translate their dialogue.

Everything flows together swiftly in one fine, free and finally fictional sweep, and the whole thing blows up much more brightly and credibly than did "The Guns of Navarone."

On the stage, in addition to the Easter pageant, are Virginia Harms, contralto; André Tahon and company; the Great Wazzans, acrobats, and the corps de ballet and the Rockettes.